

frontal attack which he should have learned before—there was the advance to Bloemfontein, across the veldt. De Wet became commander of the Free State army when Cronje was captured. De Wet had been sent westward from Ladysmith, where he distinguished himself at Nicholson's Nek, by capturing a thousand soldiers and entraining them under the noses of generals who had not yet begun to find out that they were pitted against a natural military genius.

De Wet was second to Cronje, whose contempt for the rooineks prevented him from treating them seriously, even when Roberts came to retrieve, with many thousands of new men, the blunders of the frontal attack at Magersfontein, which failed to relieve Kimberley. If Cronje had taken De Wet's advice after Magersfontein, there would have been no Paardeberg. The Hex River tunnel would have been blown up and the railway at Colesberg destroyed, and Methuen's army starved.

After Paardeberg the Boers could only delay Roberts' steady advance. They fought well, but they could not go on day and night interminably. Presidents Kruger and Steyn had been in the field, and narrowly escaped capture at Poplar Grove. Kruger went back to Pretoria, and Steyn to Bloemfontein. A council of war at that capital determined to defend the city to the last ounce of resisting power, against the advancing British. When local arrangements had been made, the President and party set out to meet the army and tell General De Wet what was required of him.

A few miles out they met a straggler or two,